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STATE FOR EAP, DRL AND IO;

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)  
SUBJECT: SHAN YOUTH PROMOTE DEMOCRACY THROUGH CONFERENCE

REF: 08 RANGOON 751

Classified By: Pol Officer Chelsia Wheeler for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

SUMMARY  
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1. (C) Through a grant from the DRL Special Response Fund, the Hsai Pen Media Group (HPMG) in November 2008 conducted a conference for ethnic Shan youth in Thibaw Township, Shan State, on how to approach Burma's upcoming 2010 elections. Nearly 90 Shan youth from Rangoon Division, Shan State and Kachin State attended and presented papers and viewpoints in an unprecedented open forum. The group reached a near consensus with 90 percent agreeing that Shan youth should encourage Shan political parties and other organizations to forego participation in the 2010 elections and instead focus their attention on building civil society and democracy awareness among Shan communities. Post requests DRL concurrence to use the remaining balance of this grant to fund the translation of democracy and human rights materials into the Shan language. See paragraph 5 for action request. End summary.

YOUTH CONFERENCE FOR 2010 ELECTIONS  
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2. (C) In November 2008, the Hsai Pen Media Group (HPMG) was awarded USD 23,036 through the DRL Special Response fund to conduct a Shan youth conference on how to approach Burma's 2010 parliamentary elections. The money was converted into kyat at the rate of 1030 kyat to the dollar, for a total of 23,727,000 kyat. The group used part of the grant funding for an initial organizing trip to recruit participants for the conference from Rangoon, Shan, and Kachin States. The grant covered travel expenses, including food and lodging costs for attending participants, as well as supplies, generator rental and conference facilities. According to HPMG's January 2009 final report, the grant was spent as follows:

- 1,100,000 kyat (USD 1,068) for honorarium for project coordinators and trainers
- 9,157,250 kyat (USD 8,890) for travel expenses for organizers and conference participants
- 4,228,550 kyat (USD 4,105) for food and accommodation
- 675,755 kyat (USD 656) for supplies and hall and generator rental fees
- Total costs: 15,161,555 kyat (USD 14,720)

HPMG reported an unspent balance of USD 8,316, due to lower-than-anticipated attendance (90 versus the 130 originally planned), and cost-saving measures. HPMG is requesting to use the remaining balance to translate two books on human rights and democracy into the Shan language for use in future workshops.

3. (C) According to Sai Aung Thein, General Editor with the Hsai Pen Media Group, this conference was the first of its

kind, "a historic event for Shan youth." Participants hailed from Shan communities throughout Burma, including Rangoon, Kachin State, and Shan State. Their backgrounds ranged from literature and culture specialists to Shan National League for Democracy members to members of the Shan State Army North (whose forces guaranteed the security for the gathering, held in Thibaw Township). According to Sai Aung Thein, the conference offered the group an opportunity to speak freely about ethnic identity and ethnic considerations posed by the 2010 parliamentary elections, as well as to develop networks among geographically dispersed Shan youth.

¶4. (C) After thorough discussion and a vote, 90 percent of conference participants agreed that, while most of them are not actually members of political parties, they will encourage Shan political parties and other organizations to forego participation in the 2010 elections. In lieu of electoral participation, the youth will encourage democracy awareness activities and civil society development in the Shan community, in hopes of one day taking an active role in government, should there be increased political space. For now, explained Sai Aung Thein, the Burmese, including Shan youth, know very little of how much real room for participation there will be under Burma's newly approved constitution.

#### COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST

¶5. (C) This conference broke new ground in that it brought together a significant number of ethnic youth to directly address and debate political participation. HPMG members conducted this project successfully, despite potential personal risk. That the conference was held in a remote area controlled by the Shan State Army North rather than the Burmese Army reduced the likelihood of regime interference. The participants laid the groundwork for a strong network that promises to spread political and civic awareness in the Shan community in the months and years to come. Embassy Rangoon requests that DRL approve the use of this grant's remaining balance of USD 8,316 to translate human rights and democracy materials into the Shan language for use in future workshops. Post will provide DRL with a specific funding proposal in the near future.

DINGER